

Kentuckians and Civic Action



Gov. Simeon Willis, Kentucky Historical Society

Governor Simeon Willis

Several times in Kentucky history, the governor has worked to improve healthcare in the state. Simeon Willis, the commonwealth's 46th governor, greatly expanded care for tuberculosis patients.

The Ohio-born Willis moved to Kentucky when he was about ten years old. After working as a journalist, he studied law and became an attorney. Appointed to the court of appeals, he served one full term. In 1943, Willis defeated J. Lyter Donaldson for governor.

During his administration, which lasted from 1943 to 1947, Willis worked with the legislature to build five tuberculosis hospitals in Ashland, Glasgow, London, Madisonville, and Paris.

Willis recognized that these hospitals were important for the health of residents and for the good of the commonwealth. When the cornerstone for the Madisonville sanitarium was placed, Willis said that “the health of the people is the foundation of the power, progress and prosperity of the state.”